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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT CHEN'S
ANNOUNCEMENT OF CESSATION OF NATIONAL UNIFICATION COUNCIL
AND GUIDELINES

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies shifted the focus of their coverage March 7 from the uproar caused by President Chen Shui-bian's announcement regarding the cession of the National Unification Council (NUC) and National Unification Guidelines (NUG) to Taiwan-born filmmaker Ang Lee's Oscar award and other local issues. The pro-status quo "China Times" ran a news story on its page four with the headline: "If Bian [Seeks to] Amend the Constitution or Draft a New Constitution, the United States May Likely Lay Its Last Cards on the Table"; vertical to this was the sub-headline: "[U.S.] Worries That Chen's Announcement of Cessation of the NUC and NUG Will Trigger Something Like That of a Dike Bursting." The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, carried a news story on its page two with the headline: "Bian Insists on Ceasing [the Functioning of] the NUC in Order to Win over the Right to Define the Status Quo." The sub-headline added: "Taiwan Strives for Preserving the Status Quo of Democracy, Freedom and Peace, and the United States Cannot Oppose [Taiwan's Goal]."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, only the English-language papers continued to editorialize on Chen's decision concerning the NUC and NUG. DPP Legislator Lin Cho-shui opined in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" that the selection of the word "cease" is intended to allow Taiwan and the United States to have its own interpretation. Lin added that he believes that the greatest concession Chen is prepared to offer to the United States is "to say that no official has used the word 'abolish,' and that he will not 'recognize' the continued existence of the NUC." An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said "Chen's pledge was meant to fool allies in Washington, enemies in Beijing and critics at home." End summary.

A) "Taiwan Must Use Leverage Wisely"

DPP Legislator Lin Cho-shui commented in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (3/7):

". In Mandarin, the word 'cease' can be translated as 'zhongzhi', but to be exact, the word 'zhongzhi' should be translated as 'terminate.' Both the Taiwanese and the US sides are aware of this, and the use of the word 'cease' is intended to let each side have its own interpretation.

After last Monday, the US has repeatedly interpreted the word 'cease' to mean 'freeze,' while Taiwan has continued to equivocate on the meaning of the word 'zhongzhi,' merely stressing that a consensus has yet to be reached on the cessation of the National Unification Council (NUC) and its guidelines. .

"These different interpretations of the word 'cease' imply that the US does not have the means to force Taiwan to act as the US wishes in every instance. . Now that the US wants Taiwan to offer yet another concession while at the same time humiliating President Chen Shui-bian, I'm afraid that the greatest concession Chen is prepared to offer is to say that no official has used the word 'abolish,' and that he will not 'recognize' the continued existence of the NUC.

"The reason that Taiwan is not able to accept everything the US wants is that although the two countries' interest overlap, there are also interests that Taiwan cannot give up. The US cannot make Taiwan do everything exactly as it wants, because although there are great differences in the strength and bargaining chips that the US, China and Taiwan possess in the international political arena, Taiwan is not completely without leverage. Great powers such as the US and China cannot always take what they want when they want it, and a small country can take advantage of the interests it shares with such great powers to protect its own interests.

"Because the timing isn't ideal, however, only some 20 percent of voters support Chen's wish to abolish the NUC and the unification guidelines - a figure that corresponds to the number of staunch DPP supporters. Almost 50 percent, however, do not support the move. This shows that while Chen's attempt to abolish the council and guidelines may have consolidated his leadership with staunch DPP supporters, he has lost his more moderate supporters. ."

B) "Did He Abolish NUC or Not?"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/7):

"The troublemaker is in trouble. But President Chen Shui-bian is undaunted and making more trouble, using his famous skill of double-taking to enhance his independence credentials at the expense of Taiwan's dignity and interests. . Ignoring the U.S. demand of clarification on the status of the NUC, the president on Friday told Japan's Yomiuri newspaper that he was determined to draft a new Taiwan Constitution for a referendum before his term ends in 2008. Again, he argued with a straight face that this would not change the status quo. .

"Chen's pledge was meant to fool allies in Washington, enemies in Beijing and critics at home. But only the Americans are willing fools, who dread to be dragged into a conflict with China over Taiwan independence but keep on turning a blind eye to Chen's separatist moves. Most of Taiwan's people don't want to be part of the PRC, neither do they want to go to war with it for independence. For more than five decades, Taiwan has been trained to accept the status of 'a self-ruled, democratic Chinese non-state beyond Beijing's jurisdiction.' It's too late to turn it into a 'non-Chinese' entity. Unless America is ready to confront the potential Chinese rival now, and, of course, destroy Taiwan in the process."

KEEGAN